“Played it till my fingers bled”: Domain-related fields of practicing and gaining expertise in popular music

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1. BACKGROUND
Expert performance is generally explained by the accumulated amount of deliberate practice (Ericsson, Kramer & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Gruber & Lehmann, 2014). While research on musical expertise exclusively focuses on the prerequisites of European classical music, little to nothing is known about the role of deliberate practice in the field of popular music (Kaczmarek, 2012). We follow the premises that there are noticeable differences between popular music and classical music regarding concepts of musical ability and practicing processes (Gembris, 2014) and that existing findings about musical expertise cannot be applied to the culture of popular music without revision. This notion is supported by findings by Creese et al. (2008), showing different attitudes of classical and non-classical musicians towards the necessary skill set for musical performance.

2. AIMS
Our aims are to identify domain-related fields and practices of gaining expertise in popular music and to explore the differences in musical expertise and deliberate practice in comparison to classical music. It should be examined which abilities are trained and how much effort is spent on practicing. Environmental and sociodemographic factors as well as professional status are taken into account.

3. METHOD
As a first step, a questionnaire was developed by participants of a seminar at Paderborn University. It was administered to 540 musicians (rock and pop, classical musicians) who had been recruited from the students’ personal networks. This first study served as a pre-study for the present study, which was carried out in a seminar at Paderborn University. It was administered to 55 students. As a first step, a questionnaire was developed by participants of a seminar at Paderborn University. It was administered to 540 musicians (rock and pop, classical musicians) who had been recruited from the students’ personal networks. This first study served as a pre-study for the present study, which was carried out in a seminar at Paderborn University. It was administered to 55 students. As a first step, a questionnaire was developed by participants of a seminar at Paderborn University. It was administered to 540 musicians (rock and pop, classical musicians) who had been recruited from the students’ personal networks. This first study served as a pre-study for the present study, which was carried out in a seminar at Paderborn University. It was administered to 55 students.

In the present study, 540 musicians (rock and pop, classical musicians) were interviewed using an online survey methodology. Respondents were recruited via social media channels and from social media groups on musical activities as well as from the students’ ensembles and personal networks. The questionnaire included questions concerning the typical amount of practice, the use of electronic media as a tool for practicing, and questions concerning the engagement with other musical activities like performing and composing as well as the knowledge of musical artists and genres.

Sample
60% of the participants identified the music they played as popular music, 17% as classical music, and 13% stated they played both types of music likewise. For 67% of the respondents music was a hobby. The others referred to music as an additional (19%) or professional (14%) occupation. The average age was 30.39 years (SD = 12.71, min. = 12, max. = 76). 63% of the respondents were male, 37% female. Due to recruitment, the level of education was high: 31% of the respondents held a university degree, 38% were studying. The group of the classical musicians was predominantly female (69%) while the pop musicians were predominantly male (78%). On average, the classical musicians were five years older (M = 34.34, SD = 14.63) than the musicians in the field of popular music (M = 28.86, SD = 11.24).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Deliberate practice

Based on the crucial role of deliberate practice in theory of expert performance, starting age, tuition (see Tab.1) and practice time (see Tab. 2) were recorded. Data show that the musicians in the field of classical music started about two years earlier with playing their instrument. 90% of them took lessons (compared to 69% of the pop musicians) and they did so for a significantly longer period of time. If they pursued music as a profession, they spend about three times as many hours practicing as the musicians in the field of popular music. Thus, the classical musicians have accumulated a significantly higher amount of deliberate practice.

4.2 Self-assessment of musical expertise

When self-assessing their musical giftedness the musicians show a high degree of self-esteem, indicating a positive self-concept (Hemming, 2002). On a 10-point scale, the respondents reach a high degree of self-esteem, indicating a positive self-concept. When self-assessing their musical giftedness the musicians show a high degree of self-esteem, indicating a positive self-concept. When self-assessing their musical giftedness the musicians show a high degree of self-esteem, indicating a positive self-concept. When self-assessing their musical giftedness the musicians show a high degree of self-esteem, indicating a positive self-concept.

4.3 Ways of practicing and learning

The level of performance on their main instruments was also self-assessed as high by the respondents: 24% of the classical musicians regarded themselves as “very good” and further 48% as “good.” They showed slightly different ratings than the pop musicians (15% “very good” and 55% “good”). Thus, the higher degree in deliberate practice of the classical musicians does not seem to determine the musicians’ perception of their own giftedness and talent, indicating a different understanding of musical expertise. Accordingly, 85% of the classical musicians report “very good” or “good” knowledge of musical notation, compared to 32% of the pop musicians.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Deliberate practice, practice behavior, and domain-related knowledge clearly differ between classical and pop musicians. Concepts of musical giftedness and talent should be discussed in the context of the specific cultural context. Also, prevalent concepts of musical expertise should be rethought and differentiated. Further research is required regarding the characteristics of the practicing processes in their relationship to different instruments and popular music genres as well as investigations of possible differences in the functions of collaborative learning.

References